

HISTORICAL REMARKS

CONCERNING THE

Mechanic Street Burial Ground,

IN THE

CITY OF WORCESTER,

OFFERED TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE LEGISLATURE OF
MASSACHUSETTS,

March 14, 1878.

BY REV. GEORGE ALLEN,
OF WORCESTER.

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To the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Representatives of this Commonwealth, now and here convened to inquire, consider and report, on the question concerning the Mechanic Street Burial Ground :

Should the inquiry be made why so humble an individual as myself ventures to come before you by this written proxy instead of being personally present, I indulge the hope that my four score and six years, together with the manifest inconvenience and hazard of being absent from home especially at this season of the year, may be accepted for what might in other circumstances be considered at least a venturesome and unwelcome intrusion.

Leaving wholly out of sight, if it be possible, all other considerations, the moral question alone is of so deep and broad an interest, not only to this commonwealth, but to humanity everywhere, as to call for (allow me most respectfully to say it) the most candid and patient attention, the best wisdom, and the most faithful report of your honorable committee.

With these views, allow me to offer to your consideration the following Historical Remarks, and Incidental Observations respecting the *Mechanic Street Burial Ground*, and more especially in regard to the interest and concern of surviving relatives and friends who yet reside in Worcester, and elsewhere in nearer or more distant towns, cities and states, of our broad and common country.

HISTORICAL REMARKS.

NO. I.

It is painful, from the nature of some subjects and the position of those most interested in them, to speak of them at all to the public ear. And yet, when spoken of indiscreetly by others, not to reply seems like acquiescing in the mischief they recommend. When such indiscretion is kindly meant, the reluctance to gainsay is not the less on that account, though the hope of a candid hearing and a forbearing hand gives encouragement to speak with no resentful plainness.

The writer of this was in hopes that the project in the *Ægis* of the 8th, to annihilate at a blow, the Burial Ground on Mechanic Street, would, like the large majority of editorial paragraphs, expire with the cry that announced its birth, and thus spare the necessity of a remonstrance against well meant, but ill considered zeal for the living and the dead. At least, such was the deserved fate of a crude scheme to disturb the sleeping dust of so many of all grades of kindred—the kindred of so many yet living, some in sight of those graves, and others remembering them, with hallowed associations, from distant parts of the country, whither they and their families are scattered. But a writer in the *Spy* of the 10th and 16th, whose initials are a prop to the cause his articles would support, gives assurance that the project of the *Ægis* is contemplated with a hope of success which forbids its unresisted execution.

We can readily believe that neither the editor of the *Ægis*, nor his coadjutor in the *Spy*, has any kindred among those sleepers whose repose they are both, from motives of humanity, so solicitous to disturb. Though each professes, with unquestioned sincerity, a double concern, for the dead who are already dead, and the living who are yet alive, the whole of such concern is evidently nothing beyond that general and vague interest which is awakened by remote, indefinite, feeble and fugitive associations. No sacred dust of father, mother, brother, sister, wife or child, whose affections have been intertwined with his, for many well remembered years, could have prompted the one to propose, with death's own apathy, to "sell the ground for a sum of money," and the other to estimate with so natural, though well imitated coldness, the "gravel" which as yet enclose or is mingled with more precious dust. Each of these writers must have forgot, in his zeal for exhumation and care of the town's exchequer, what indeed they cannot but know, that even the common earth, that is trampled with unconscious feet, acquires a reverence by that which is blended with it, and has been intrusted to its safe keeping till "the dead shall rise incorruptible." It is so by a wise and beneficent law of nature, co-extensive with mankind, in whatever age, and among all nations and tribes all round the globe. No matter what its philosophy, the fact is plain and out of dispute. To abrogate this law is

to nullify the will of Heaven. He who, in one way, seeks to rid his nature of its original law, manifests his submission to it in a thousand other ways. Wholly to set aside that law would be wholly to undo himself—to break up his social being, and quench the first and last sparks of virtue given to warm the human breast. Let him who will, call it superstition, it is yet his master in spite of himself, ordained to be so by the will of God for the well-being of man.

For one, the writer of this article is more than unwilling, is wholly averse, to believe that the contemplated trespass on the sanctuary of the dead will be so unresisted and uncared for as its advocates have ventured to imagine and hope. To him, without adopting either the benediction or the curse, there is yet something true to human sympathy, and to which man's heart is every where responsive, in the epitaph which Shakspeare, the wisest commentator on the human heart, caused to be inscribed on his own monument :

"Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust inclosed here :
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones."

The project to disinter the multitude of all ages, who have been inhumed, some for more than half a century, in the Mechanic Street Burial Ground, is liable to so many valid objections, that it is difficult, within proper limits, to expose them all, or indeed to exhibit any with that force and fulness which the whole truth would require. If, in our remarks, the selection of topics shall not be the most judicious, care shall be taken to introduce none that is unimportant ; and if the manner shall fail to be what some might desire, it shall at least be as courteous as may comport with an honest plainness of speech, such as the nature and condition of the subject seem to demand.

In respect, then, to the proposal to convoke a Town-meeting, to empty at once a thousand graves, and carry off their quiet owners, none knows whither, and under the supervision of none knows whom, though, in many cases, they would be certain to be strangers to the untimely risen dead, if not to the country itself, there are questions which may well be put, though not so well answered by the advocates of so unusual an experiment on the endurance of humanity.

We might, not impertinently, inquire into the rights of Towns in such matters, and the rights of individuals as well as communities. We might inquire into the nature and extent of the pledge which seems to be at least virtually given to those who bury their dead in a public cemetery, and whether a Town that has authorized such sepulture has any reserved right, either from the nature of its powers or any special provision of the statute book, to eject the tenants of the grave at its own deliberate will, or as popular caprice may be blown in the direction of such an experiment on the dead and the living.

We might ask, without any extravagant presumption, whether, both to the dead and their surviving friends, a pledge is not given, for full and certain reliance, that the repose of the grave shall be protected by the public care and vigilance, and not be broken by the popular wisdom of to-day, that may be its repented folly to-morrow.

Should we go a step further, and inquire in behalf of absent relatives gone to other Towns and States, whose spirits not seldom come back, as on a holy pilgrimage, to re-visit the homes of their childhood, and the graves of their

sires and other cherished kin, we might ask for the wherefore of their confidence in the unbroken slumber of the grave, and on what reliable pledge they erected, ere they left, with mingled hope and sadness, their own birth-place and their fathers' sepulchres, those monumental tablets which record the names and times and resting places of death's lowly sleepers, and which tell the passing traveller, himself journeying to his long home, of the cheerful triumphant faith of those who reached theirs first,—the faith of "life and immortality," expressed in words like these :

God, my Redeemer, lives,
And ever from the skies
Looks down and watches all my dust,
Till HE shall bid it rise.

Should we ask, once more, in behalf of those whose friends were always few—those needy ones, who, when alive, had on all the face of the globe no certain dwelling place, nor foot of earth they called their own, but under whose ill-fed ribs there beat a heart like every other heart, and who, in expectation of no monumental stone,

" Their bones from insult to protect,"

yet hoped, when their last worldly toil and sorrow should be over, to own within that earth a peaceful narrow bed—should we ask what bred in their bosoms this strong and cherished hope, though no kindred should be left behind to watch their last sleep, and defend their honest title to a grave, what response would come back to us to meet the feelings which naturally prompt these inquiries ? This the Ægis and the Spy have already told.

Were we to persevere and pry sharply into these matters, and question, not those committed journals, nor yet the aspiring obelisk and chiseled urn of some new, assorted cemetery, where wealth and fashion board up there pride and grief together, but of those slaty grave-stones of the old "Common" burial-ground, which are plucked up, dragged off, and dashed into pieces, almost from week to week, under the warned but regardless eyes of our municipal fathers, commonly called, for their worth and wisdom, Selectmen, we might then, from such effrontery to all that is decent and sacred, be persuaded, though against nature and truth, that public grave-yards are indeed an unpledged, irresponsible trust, and that not only Towns, but who-soever will, may desecrate the grave, and make the sepulchres of whole generations the wanton sport of giddy youth, or chosen ravage-ground of full grown avarice.

No. II.

The Ægis in its programme of wholesale exhumation, under the very significant title of "AN OLD BURIAL GROUND," seeks to ingratiate its repulsive project by words of "*high regard for the dead,*" and "*tender fulfilment of duty,*" devolved on the living. It also places much reliance, for the accomplishment of its indirect scheme, on some recent "*advance of public sentiment.*"

We take the liberty, however, to assure the editor of that respectable journal, that such regard for the dead as would be demonstrated by turning

them out of their graves, that portion of the living who truly represent the dead will be most gratified to dispense with, and the earlier he shall wholly give over the hope manifesting such regard, the sooner will their feelings be relieved who have been visited with his proffered kindness.

As to the "advance of public sentiment in all matters of this nature," on which is placed so flattering a confidence by the *Ægis*, it may be found, after all, an idle speculation rather than a sober fact. We have, of late, heard much, very much, of some wonderful revolution in human nature, which some peculiar property of the nineteenth century, or some incantation of its wizzards, has happily brought about, though, as yet, we have not had the good fortune to witness the brilliant and oft boasted result. Nor, having already lived so long in this old fashioned world, dare we hope to reach the happy period, when, by the "advance of public sentiment," the relatives and near friends of the dead shall desire, consent, or endure to have their remains unsepulchred, and borne away from fixed hallowed associations to some place of no previous interest whatever. To us, the time seems far distant when men shall hasten to annihilate the natural and cherished sentiments of their hearts, and desire that the very ground which has treasured up so faithfully the dust of loved ones, be delved, and shoveled off, and instead of graves and monuments, have stretched over it "the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness."

There is much more of permanence and consistency in the principle of human nature, and far more to be relied on in the uniformity of its developments, than the admirers of such a revolution of man's soul are willing we should suspect. It is the misfortune, if not the sin, of not a few minds,—some of them of undoubted brilliancy though of much questioned wisdom,—to confound recent modifications of matter with the fixed laws of mind. Because the impulse of steam and the long instant leap of artificial lightning are in many things, fast changing the condition of the world and tying its ends together, they are more than half persuaded that some equal if not more wonderful change must have taken place, or is about to be experienced, in the physical and moral constitution of man.

While some rapturously believe, and would force their faith on other minds, that learning, wisdom and virtue are henceforth to have but little more to contend with, and indeed nothing more than the prejudices of a few obstinate old fellows whom time will soon push out of the way, and that hereafter the children of men are to be all but born with those gifts which hitherto have been such slow and painstaking acquisitions, others would persuade their neighbors, that, by an "advance of public sentiment," the ever gushing springs of grief to the human heart have shrunk all away, and that brighter and fuller fountains of feeling have broke forth to cheer and fertilize what hitherto had been the parched and barren desert of life.

For us, we confess it, we have seen no such vision, nor, as yet, feel we authorized to indulge in such hope. Nay, further, the longer we live, and the more we try to see the world as it is, the less are we likely to be dazzled with these visions of man which would extinguish the light of his own long experience, and cast into dark eclipse the revealed wisdom of God. We must see something far more extraordinary than anything we have yet seen, to make us give up the evidence of our senses and the testimony of all past time, for the more brilliant dreams of wakeful enthusiasm. Till children come of rosebuds, instead of springing from the stock of Adam, or till those already born in the common course of nature shall jump out of

their skins and soar aloft with the bright plumage of angels, we shall yet believe that he who would best understand human nature and its true susceptibilities, while poring over it in his own bosom, will do well, and best of all, to read it by the light of that "old" book called *THE BIBLE*. But if any are too nice and dainty for such a repast, or if that book is too religious for his taste, and if the reading of it be too severe a task for his refined and classic nerves, let him ponder on the exposition of man in the dramas of Shakespeare and the essays of Addison. Let him, if he will, consent by any means to be wise, go back yet further in the records and commentaries which show what man has been in his essential, constitutional, abiding elements, and turn over, with exploring eyes, the shrewd and pointed as well as graceful verse of Horace, and the yet more distant but not less full-fringed lore of Homer, and he will learn, unless wholly given over to delusion, that wisdom has always had children to justify her claims. He will understand, by so doing, that as face answereth to face in the water, just so the heart of man in one age finds its image reflected in every other, and that it is far better to study, with sober eyes, the realities of life, than to dream, with brilliant fancies, of things that never were and never can be. Then, when he has come to his unmistified senses, will he know, beyond all doubt, that a burial ground, however common, however "old," is the place in which those who sleep there, expected to "lie down and rise not again till the heavens be no more;" that it is the place to which surviving kindred followed them in the freshness and fulness of their grief; that it is the place which the feet of husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters have visited with cautious, melancholy steps, and from which their own hopes have been lifted above the weakness and sorrow of this world; that it is the place where, from time to time, hallowed associations have been gathered, which can be transferred to no other spot under the whole canopy of heaven, how much soever the luxuriance of nature and the prodigality of art may contribute to make the abode of the dead the attraction of the living. He who will thus read, will be assured, beyond suspicion of mistake, that no silent retirement, no solemn shade, no sculptured marble, no, nothing whatever, that can decorate, disguise, or make significant the solemnity of death's house, can compensate for those broken associations which love and grief and time have made to cluster round the *first* burial place of friends.

NO. III.

Among the special grievances which constitute special reasons for vacating a populous grave-yard, and driving through it, at a bargain, "stern ruin's ploughshare," are the weighty facts set forth in the following statement of the *Ægis*:—

"It is seldom that one can pass along the lower end of Mechanic street without seeing clotheslines heavy laden swinging in all directions over the graves, or noisy boys, quite as careless and ruthless as they are noisy, or men smoking with indifference and mirth within those grounds."

This is indeed a grave accusation against three distinct classes of offenders—the women, the men, and the boys. It is not our purpose to question the general correctness of either of the several counts of the indictment,

though, having ourselves passed, for several years, "along the lower end of Mechanic street," about 365 times in each year, we do not remember to have seen, in a single instance, "men smoking," either with or without "mirth" within those grounds. Possibly we may have seen, in rare instances not treasured up, such a sight as the Ægis has been so familiar with and is so much grieved at. But be that as it may, or admitting the full statement, could not the Ægis so confide in its doctrine of "the advance of public sentiment in all these matters" as to give earlier notice of this ascertained fact, and thus bring that well grown sentiment to bear in the removal of his alleged grievance, instead of the removal, against the whole world's and all time's consent, of a whole grave-yard, with all that is gathered in it, and all that is erected on it "*Sacred to the Memory*" of its inhabitants? Such insufficiency and allsufficiency of "public sentiment in all these matters," seem to depend very much on which end of the telescope the philosopher chooses to bring to his eye. If, on the part of the men, an evil exists so aggravated as the Ægis alleges, one would think a remedy might be found by a less desperate resort than that journal recommends.

But the women, if not the greatest, are not the least of the transgressors complained of. Does the Ægis indeed think that their government is so irresistible, or so unpersuadeable, that not only the living town must submit without a remonstrance or entreaty, but that the dead also must abandon their graves and give up the enclosing earth to their supremacy? How then, shall he hope, after such acknowledgment of their right of possession, to drive the wistful bargain of the town, and "sell the ground for a sum of money?" If we cannot fully agree with the Ægis as to the amount of sin committed by the women who in its indictment, as of old, are placed "first in the transgression," we do admit that their offence is much more showy, and that if fewer of their white flags should flutter there in the breeze, not only the chivalry of the Ægis but the feelings of the community at large would be, even more than they already are, indebted to woman's kindness.

And yet, if we might, without too much offence, make one exception, and, intercede for any, it should be worthy "old Hepsy," whose dwelling joins death's door, that she may still enter the grave-yard in peace, and a little longer stretch her brief line from tree to tree, in its most unsettled corner. It is only asking for a little patience for the last remnant of a tribe that have vanished away like the forests where they chased the panther and the deer. The fourscore and five years that have so bent her tall frame, and crippled her queenly step, plead much better than we that none molest or make her afraid. Soon in the sure course of nature her not "heavy laden" clothesline will be missing, with herself: but while she stays, perhaps a few months more, let her enjoy quietly her little privilege above the grave-yard's turf, and, if she chooses, let her at last sleep beneath it, in the silent neighborhood of her own generation, till the dead, both small and great, out of every tribe and nation, shall rise together. Then, when the distinctions and rivalries of earth shall be over, her work having been done and well done, shall she walk erect or grateful bow in that ever spotless robe, the gift of him who, as she trusts, hath "loved her and washed her from her sins in his own blood."

But what shall be done with the boys, those "ruthless" sprigs of the new and hopeful generation who are to carry out the "advance of public senti-

ment" to its extreme of perfection, when their fathers, the remnants of nature as it used to be, shall have fallen asleep? If they had not been, according to the testimony of the *Ægis*, "*ruthless* as they are noisy," we might take up their defence and plead in mitigation of their last mentioned crime, that to be "noisy" is part of their original sin, and that they came as honestly by it as did their now more silent fathers.

We ourselves have seen children there, boys and girls, Anglo-Saxon, Hibernian, and Anglo-Saxo-Africans. Nor were we overgrieved to see them there; at least, not enough so as to wish the destruction of the graveyard, with all unspeakable concomitants. If there was any thing at all offensive either in their presence or their noise, we were at least assured that on that cherished spot consecrated to the dead by holier drops than are shed by sprinkling priest, they breathed a more life-giving air than they were wont to inhale in stifled streets and pent-up dwelling.—yea purer than can ever be breathed there when the spirit of speculation and improvement, so called, shall have sold the ground for a "large sum" of money.

Had we been disposed to chide those children for their thoughtless noise, could we have helped remembering our own boyhood days, when other restless feet, such as Nature gives to children, gambol'd time and again over the same sober place, as nimble-footed and light-hearted as we? Nor have we quite forgot a whole gathering of grievances akin to that of children's playfulness. We remember when the squirrel jumped there from one long narrow hillock to another, and climbed the tallest head-stone, and raised his ruddy banner, and scolded away, with flippancy bickering, at the young intruders on his prescriptive domain. And, even now, there come up, at the mysterious bidding of memory, the happy mirthful birds that haunted there or flew up thither from the subjacent meadow and the neighboring thicket, what time Spring had chased from the grave-yard the icy feet of Winter, and put on her glad-green mantle thick-sprinkled with floral stars; or Summer gilded with down-flung splendor all the ground, and sent thither the frolic zephyrs to dance among the graves their giddy whirl; or many-hued gaudy Autumn, with her bright goldenrod and other un-sad flowers, profaned, as even in their season, with gayest livery the sober field of death. There the robin piped his mellow honest matins, and the whippoorwill, at measured intervals, half sung, half whistled his wild boding vespers, and the fire-plumed hang-bird, above its pensile thread-built air-hung castle, chanted its full clear liquid lay; and the glossy jet wing finch, on its spear-girt thistle-throne, or, sultan-like, on the milk-weed' flossy mat, shone rich in royal gold; and the frisky wren, hopping and flitting, twittered to its mate its shrill melodious ditty; and the unaspiring sparrow chirped rejoicingly over its rising brood; and the gay red wing black-bird on some selected perch keeps honest lonely vigil, and utters his timely hushnote to the hunger peep of nestlings among the bulrushes in the subjacent meadow; and the more sober lark swelled high and sweet, or sunk, with pensive cadence, its brief heavenward hymn; and the shy trim woodland thrush with brimful joy, warbled all abroad, from the summit of the hazel copse, its matchless nuptial song; and to aid the choral melody, the saucy cream-capped boblink, as it fluttered by with feigned trepidation, to beguile suspected rovers from its nest, or sat perched, like a sentinel, on the tall, slender birch tree's topmost twig, jingled off its tinkling giggling ridiculous jargon, well pleased and pleasing all with its giddy, yet most articulate nonsense. All these, and more were there; for

the merry social cricket, the swift whirring beetle, the bright-glancing fire-fly, gilding with tiny flash the solemn misty eve, and the grasshopper, piping shrilly in the blaze of sultry noon, while the renovated butterfly, just risen from the decay of its air-hung coffin, hovered among the wild-flowers, fanning the fainting rose or kissing the lily's ruddy bloom; these, and a nameless multitude of other joyful things, mingled their various revelry, as if Nature never meant any spot of earth to be consecrated to melancholy, or cursed with never relieved sadness.

And, kind friends, say, who shall be offended if, with other light-hearted creatures, children do now and then lift up their life-toned voices even in the sad solemn precincts of silent death? We do not, of course, desire or expect that such an enclosure shall be their ordinary and most familiar playground, but we will be the last to place such interdict on what has ever been, as to make the grave give up its dead before God's time, for no direr necessity than such a profanation of their resting-place. When went there by a time that did not witness, without concern, the bounding feet and heart-full shout of children even in the solemn church-yard? If their unthinking gambols in and over such places were to justify and demand the untimely rending of sepulchres, what ancient venerable house of death in the land whence came the Pilgrims, would not long since have been uninhabited, and have disappeared from all human knowledge? Who has not read, in story and in song, that children's feet do not desecrate any the most sacred dust over which they happen to rove with merry hearts?

"There's a white stone placed upon yonder tomb,
Beneath is a soldier lying;
The death-wound came amid sword and plume,
When banner and ball were flying.
"Yet now he sleeps, the turf on his breast
By wet wild-flowers surrounded;
The church shadow falls o'er his place of rest,
Where the steps of his childhood bounded."

NO. IV.

The Ægis of the 22d, with a parting arrow, gives notice of its retirement from the field it so gallantly entered. It has also proclaimed its reliance for the success of its enterprise, on a stouter champion. Perhaps this was "the better part of valor." In a difficult but defensible cause, we should certainly commend it to such discretion, not reluctant ourselves to rely on the force of such an arm. If "A. D. F." should fail of success in any cause for which he buckles on his armor, it might not unaptly be written over him

Si Pergama dextra
Defendi possent, etiam hac defensa fuissent.

But though the Ægis seems knowingly to speak, as if with authority it could appoint its champion, we question such prerogative in the present instance, notwithstanding the concurrent appearance of "A. D. F." in the Transcript of the 22d. Nor do we assume or believe that "A. D. F." has courted any reliance on his championship. We appreciate too well his un-

derstanding and his heart to suspect him of having any inkling for a commission, by demand of service or as a volunteer, to such an office. We are not slow to think that rather than to aspire to the high place of combat, and mingle with the clang and tumult of arms, he would much prefer,

“Along the cool sequestered vale of life,
To hold the noiseless tenor of his way.”

Regarding him then neither as a commander nor a subaltern, but as one who speaks and acts for himself, and, therefore, as he thinks and feels, without the love of strife or pride of victory, we are persuaded he will not take it amiss, if, in the same spirit, we calmly examine into the correctness of facts, on which, as illustrations of his principle, he seems confidently to rely.

In proof of his main position, the propriety of vacating a populous graveyard, and removing the earth which contains, and is mingled with, the ashes of the dead, he adduces the example of the worthy and enlightened citizens of New Haven, in performing a somewhat similar pious office a few years since. His own words, which are as follows, will best express his premises and conclusions.

“So far as the writer knows, the Cemetery in New Haven was the first in New England, which was in any degree ornamentally laid out. There, the burying-ground was in the heart of the city, and constituted what is now the beautiful Common. Through the instrumentality of that enlightened and public spirited citizen, the late James Hillhouse, the Cemetery lot was procured and laid out; the graves, except those now under the meeting houses, were removed to the Cemetery, and the old burying ground given up to public uses. Through that ground, the street which is now so beautiful, with its arching elms, was opened. Whose feelings were hurt by this change? Who now regrets it? So it would be here.”

As the foregoing is “A. D. F.’s” chosen illustration of the principle he desires should be prevalent, and still attempts to make so, notwithstanding the decided and most deliberate opposition of many near relatives and friends of those whose exhumation is contemplated; and as the notable example of the good people of New Haven is the only instance he adduces, if not the only one he can adduce, that can well bear on this question, let those whom he would persuade to adopt his views, see how stands the test—fact he has set up for their light.

Let them first look at his statement that “*the burying-ground—in the heart of the city,—constituted what is now the beautiful Common.*” How do the alleged and real facts correspond? In the old part of the city there are two large Commons, or “Greens” as they are there called, divided from each other by Temple street, so named for the churches which stretch along its upper border. The lower one, which is level, and which, for its greater magnitude and excelling beauty, is called “*The Green*,” and which corresponds with “A. D. F.’s” description of “*The beautiful Common*,” was never used as a burial place. And as to the upper Green which rises gently toward the College, (*Salve, magna Parens!*) the fact is this: all but a small part of it—the burial ground that jutted out a little way, not where the “*meeting-houses*” stand, but in the rear of the *Centre Church* only—had its present dimensions time out of mind before the period contemplated by “A. D. F.” when the breaking up of the dead was so wisely decreed for the accommodation of themselves and the living. Such is the history of “the beautiful Common.”

We come now to the assertion which informs us of the laying out of Temple street, viz : “ *Through that ground [the old burying place] the street which is now so beautiful, with its arching elms, was opened.*”—As to this, what say those very elms?—They are of age and can speak for themselves. When we held sweet converse with them some six and thirty years ago, rejoicing in their cool and grateful shade and admiring their stately columns and the dignified grace of their then overarching boughs, the spirit that was in them whispered to us of the wisdom and the kindness of still older men who had long before planted that verdurous avenue for generations who should rise up and call them blessed. The street which ran through their long stout files, was probably coeval with the city, having on it, in our early days, churches then venerable for their age as well as their holy use. Such is the real history of that street; and how unlike its fancied origin!

Let us next attend to the statement, by no means the least important, that “ *the graves, except those now under the meeting-houses, were removed to the Cemetery, and the old burying-ground given up to public uses.*” Is it so? We only wonder that one usually so cautious and correct should have fallen into such a series of errors. Had he considered for a moment, in this case, what he also seems not to have duly thought of in that which is nearer home, he would have seen the impossibility of what he has regarded as an easy and most commendable fact. We can hardly suspect him of not having known that the grave of Eaton, the first governor of the Colony of New Haven, and the graves of Whalley and Dixwell who adjudged Charles the First to the scaffold were made there, with those of many early settlers of the city. And how could the bodies or the identified dust that had lain there nearly two hundred years be snatched off to some other experimental place of repose?

Ask the citizens of New Haven if they have done the deed imputed to them, and they will quick reply, “No! We have never desired or dared to make the attempt. Our fathers’ sepulchres are with us unto this day, their ashes untouched by any but the invisible and inevitable hand of Time.”

The people of that city have not as yet surrendered the safeguards of humanity to the ravages of *improvement*. Instead of suffering the rude monuments of the early inhabitants to be, as on our old Common burial-ground they are, wantonly plucked up and shattered in broad day-light, they have treasured them up with religious care, though we are not quite sure that the wisdom of the head was quite equal to the intention of the heart, when they displaced those monuments to marshall them as a crowded detachment of cenotaphs in the new Cemetery.

Had they, as is done around the old “Granary” burial ground on a principal street of our metropolis, erected on a granite, or their own free-stone base an appropriate palisade, and planted among those monuments trees such as composed the forest when it shaded the home of the New Haven Pilgrims, they would have given additional vigor to the principle of respect for the dead, which they have so carefully nourished, in accordance with the common sentiment of mankind. Then would they have had on that Green a beauty, both natural and moral, for which the plastered burlesque of Grecian architecture on the border of that grave yard can never begin to compensate.

Whatever truth touches the heart works a part of the process ordained for wisdom, virtue and happiness. The external history of the dead has

furnished many an interesting page for the contemplation of the living. As that part of it which relates to the Pilgrim sleepers at New Haven is not a little instructive on the subject of these articles, we devote to it another number.

NO. V.

In our last we examined certain premises of "A. D. F.," from which, for himself, but especially for others, he drew the conclusion that the annihilation of the Mechanic Street Burial Ground would be a deed fit in itself, and most agreeable to all concerned. The conclusion was in different forms, affirmative and interrogative—the questions not seeking knowledge, but giving instruction with the force of emphatic affirmations.

After setting forth an analogous destruction at New Haven, and the beauty that sprang up from the ruin, surpassing the fabled temple of Jupiter with its oak and linden shades, he asks and affirms, "*Whose feelings were hurt at the change? Who now regrets it? So it would be here;*" as much as to say, the wise and humane deed at New Haven, instead of being matter of regret to any, was a source of gratification to all; and as such was the happy consequence of ruin there, so the like universal gratification would be the effect of an equal or greater ruin here. We believe this paraphrase is nowhere outside of the text it means to represent.

We have no where questioned, we do not doubt, the sincerity or the kind intention of that text, or of the chapters to which it is so intimately related. We are well persuaded that their author would be the last among the late to wound the feelings of any whose feelings might be hurt by the process he recommends, and the good result of which he illustrates by the light of so notable an example. But if that light, like the bewildering phantom that is said sometimes to hover in the misty night over neglected graves, has disappeared and left the trustful conclusion that followed it, in the dark, it is yet further due to our subject, to this community, and especially to the citizens of New Haven, to make the example of the latter as effective as their regard for the memory of the dead has been signal. We should do injustice to "A. D. F." if we thought him not enough ingenuous to allow without displeasure the most public appearance and the clearest light of truth, certainly at least so far as to replace the good name of New Haven where it was, before a mistake had depressed it from its just elevation.

We remember, as if that day were now shining, when that goodly city was moved with a sensation to which its equanimity is not often subjected, and which slight causes are not able to effect. It was nothing less than the fear that the dead might be untimely disturbed in their graves. In 1812, when, on account of its age and the need of larger accommodations, the First Church on Temple street, was taken down, the parish worshipping there resolved to extend the rear of the new edifice a little distance upon the old burying ground. This must be done or they must forsake the cherished associations of the place where their fathers worshipped, and they were dedicated and dedicated themselves to God. Such associations are

very strong, and all good associations are useful, and useful in proportion to their strength. But by many it was apprehended that in sinking the foundation of the new building, the ashes of the dead would be reached and disturbed. The consequence was an irritation and a ferment which can hardly be credited by any who look on such cause as a light matter. Men of respectability, and some high in public stations, were ready, among that law-abiding people, to trample on law itself, and to arrest with violence a desecration of graves; nor until a reliable assurance was had that not even the house of God should molest the sanctuary at its foot, was the animosity pacified to a decent calm. This we believe was the first outbreak at New Haven for the protection of ancient graves.

Years after, we cannot say when, it also became necessary to take down the old State House on the upper Green beside the same burying ground, and to re-build there a larger edifice for the same use. A renewed apprehension of trespass on graves created a fresh ferment. Kindred of the dead, and others who from special causes had respect for their memory, with still others whose sentiments, kindled by the occasion, were the common sentiments of mankind, were made fervid to the boiling point by this renewed apprehension of sacrilege. Nor did their heat subside except by an assurance like that which allayed the preceeding tumult. Such is part of the external history of the dead in the old burying ground at New Haven. The rest we shall give as we find it at hand in a "Report" by the learned Professor Olmstead, who, as a good man must, contemplates alternately the grave and the skies. Should it be read by those whose attention needs most to be called to the subject, we cautiously indulge a faint hope that it may, instead of demolishing the Mechanic Street Burial Ground, do something to protect from further insult the more ancient grave yard on our Common.

"At a court of Common Council for the city of New Haven, holden Oct. 27, 1820, a committee was appointed to take into consideration the situation of the ancient burying ground:—who reported 'that said ground was in a condition of total neglect, and going to ruin, in a manner which they deemed inconsistent with the religious and moral sense of this community, and indicating a want of decent respect for the memory of the dead.' Among other suggestions the committee expressed the opinion that 'the greatest respect which can be paid to the memory of the dead and the feelings of the survivors, would be shown by the erection of a solid and permanent wall around the ancient ground.' 'But if the prevailing opinions of the citizens shall be opposed to any enclosure of the ancient ground,' they suggested the removal of the monuments to the new ground."

"This report was accepted by the Common Council, and it was voted, 'that it is expedient that measures be adopted for the removal of the monuments, [and] for the erection of a common monument in the rear of the Centre Church."

"The court of Common Council *unanimously* recommended to the Mayor, to call a city meeting, which was accordingly convened Nov. 30, 1820. And it was voted that, 'as the course proposed is respectful to the memory of the dead, and satisfactory to the feelings of the surviving relatives, it is proper that this city assume the expense of the same, to the extent of the sum proposed."

"After the committee had made every preparation for the removal, PUBLIC SERVICE was held in the Centre Church on the morning of the

26th of June, 1821. A great concourse was assembled, and the exercises were performed in a very impressive and appropriate manner, by the Rev. clergy of the different denominations, and a funeral address prepared by Abraham Bishop, Esq., was pronounced, abounding in eloquent and impressive sentiments suited to the occasion."

"After the religious services in the church, the committee,* accompanied by the President and officers of the college, commenced the work of the removal, by conveying the monuments of officers and students to the new college square, [in the Cemetery.] Their next care was the removal, on application of survivors, of monuments into family lots in the new ground. All the other monuments were then removed to city square No. 1."

This narrative of transactions at New Haven, extracted from the "Report" drawn up by Professor Olmstead, as chairman of a committee of thirty-two respectable citizens, "appointed to inquire into the condition of the New Haven Burying Ground," furnishes apt instruction to those interested in the subject of these articles.

Each part of the history of the dead at New Haven is interesting, and each throws a clear light on the project of disinterment and devastation here. It is difficult to say which part of that history is better fitted to instruct any who need wisdom in such matters—that which was reverently not done by the citizens of New Haven, or that which they reverently did. In honoring the memory of their fathers, they honored themselves; and in the spirit of both their proceedings and refrainings, they have set an example worthy of the renown of their city. Our community have been called upon to admire their example of an enlightened humanity. Let this call not be forgotten, nor its monitory wisdom forsaken. When a like regard for the peace of graves and care for the monuments which *mark the place of sepulture*, shall characterize the citizens of Worcester, there will be, amidst much else that reflects honor on the town, no fictitious "advance of public sentiment" in such matters. The improvement, instead of being in men's fancies, will be before their eyes. Then will the reproach, as was that at New Haven, be wiped away here, that the burial grounds in Mechanic Street and on the Common are "*in a condition of total neglect, and going to ruin, in a manner inconsistent with the religious and moral sense of this community, and indicating a want of decent respect for the memory of the dead.*"

*James Hillhouse, Abraham Bishop, Samuel Merwin, Harry Crosswell, Nathaniel W. Taylor, William Thatcher, William Mix.



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